

## 1 Samuel 2:18-20, 26

<sup>18</sup>But Samuel ministered before the LORD while he was still a young boy, dressed in a special vest made of linen. <sup>19</sup>His mother would make a little robe for him and bring it to him whenever she came up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. <sup>20</sup>Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say, “May the LORD give you offspring from this woman in place of the son she asked for, whom she loaned to the LORD.” Then they would go back to their home.

<sup>26</sup>The young man Samuel continued to grow, and he increased in favor with both the LORD and with men.

## Grow with God

### I.

She felt as though God didn’t hear her prayers, because the desired answer never seemed to come. Still, she continued to pray. More fervently all the time, she prayed. The subject of her prayers was always the same. More than anything else in the whole wide world she wanted a son.

Did you know that God answers prayers in one of three ways? His answers are, generally speaking, “Yes,” “Maybe later,” or “I’ll give you something better.” The answer is never *really* “No.”

Sometimes it *feels* as though the answer is “No!” God’s answer may, in reality, be “Maybe later.” What to do when God doesn’t *seem* to answer your prayers? Keep praying. Luther taught people to pray as if everything depends on God and work as if everything depends on *you*. In so many cases, *you* may be the answer to your own prayers. So keep praying when you don’t seem to be getting answers, and at the same time work to bring your prayer to fruition.

In Hannah’s case, only so much could be done. Hannah’s husband, Elkhannah, had two wives, and the other wife had children, while Hannah had none. Childlessness, back then, was sometimes seen as a judgment from God. Peninnah, the other wife, gloated about the fact that she had children while Hannah did not. She hung childlessness over Hannah’s head like a curse.

Hannah certainly felt God was not answering her prayers. What do *you* do when you feel that way?

Elkhannah was a priest in the back country in Israel. It was the custom to make an annual trip to Shiloh—the place where the tabernacle and the altar to the Most High God were located at the time—to worship. While they were at Shiloh Elkhannah offered special sacrifices to the Lord.

Hannah felt closer to the Lord when they were near God’s altar and the tabernacle, so she redoubled her prayers every year while they were there. She didn’t stop her prayer just because she hadn’t gotten the answer she wanted, but kept praying. Fervently she prayed. Sincerely she prayed. This wasn’t some short-term prayer project—a temporary fantasy that changed with the shifting winds—her prayers went on year after year. Year after year, the answer appeared to be the same: “No.”

But maybe...just maybe...the answer was actually “Maybe later.” She kept praying. Elkhannah was a good husband. He loved and cherished his wife, Hannah. He wanted to make her feel better about herself and her situation. He made sure to let her know that he held Hannah in high regard. In his own way, Elkhannah indicated to his wife that maybe the Lord was answering “I’ll give you something better.”

At one of their trips to Shiloh, Eli the priest spotted Hannah in her posture of fervent prayer. Her lips were moving, but she wasn't speaking aloud. Eli thought she must have been drinking, and told her to put her alcohol away.

Hannah told him: "Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief" (1 Samuel 1:16, NIV84). Eli understood. He told her: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him" (1 Samuel 1:17, NIV84).

After years of asking, "Maybe later" finally came. God blessed her with a baby boy, whom she named Samuel, which means: "Heard by God." Hannah had vowed to the Lord that if he granted her request, she would dedicate her son to serve the Lord. When Samuel was about 3-years-old she took him to Shiloh to fulfill her vow.

## II.

Prayer life can be hard sometimes, can't it? You wait and wait for an answer that never seems to come. But where do you *look* for the answers? To find *her* answer, Hannah had to wait and see whether or not she would become pregnant.

Whether the answer you seek is able to be seen by something that happens in your life or not, it is true that you will be more attuned to God and his will if you are immersed in Scripture, as Hannah was. Read your Bible and you will know God's will for your life. Attend worship regularly and you will be reminded from God's Word *there* what God's will is in so many areas. Perhaps if you are regular in worship and in Bible reading you will begin to realize that it is the *spiritual* things that are most important, not physical things, or even people, sometimes. Your prayer life will become much deeper.

Hannah's son, Samuel, was born in tumultuous times. The last verse in the book of the Judges says: "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25, NIV84). That sounds much like *our* times, doesn't it? People all seem to do as they see fit, rather than looking to God's Word to see what *he* says. Even Christians prevaricate and come up with rationalizations that allow them to continue in their own pet sins as if God will understand the evils of the day and excuse them.

Even in the church when Samuel was young, "everyone did as he saw fit." Eli's sons were priests. Presumably Eli had taught them what was appropriate, but they didn't follow what God wanted for them and from them. They were wicked priests and used the priesthood to their own advantage.

Godless attitudes abound, even in church people. Excuses are made. Liberties are taken with God's moral law that he wants all people of all time to follow.

## III.

Samuel was different. He had a God-fearing attitude. "Samuel ministered before the LORD while he was still a young boy, dressed in a special vest made of linen" (1 Samuel 2:18, EHV). Perhaps Eli took some joy in training Samuel, since he knew that his own sons were not serving appropriately. Samuel even dressed in clothing that was similar to that of a priest as he went about duties that were appropriate for his age and ability and understanding. He was not a priest yet, but already at a young age he was a priest in training.

As for Hannah, she knew her job didn't stop just because her prayer for a son had been answered, or since she had dropped him off at the tabernacle to serve the Lord with the priests in fulfillment of her vow. She had long had an attitude of continued prayer. No doubt she continued to pray for her son, that he would be faithful in his duties in the tabernacle and in service to the Lord.

Elkhannah and his family continued to make their yearly visits to Shiloh. “His mother would make a little robe for him and bring it to him whenever she came up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice” (1 Samuel 2:18, EHV). Not only did she pray for him, Hannah continued to do all she could to be the answer to her own prayers. The little robes she made year after year gave him some dignity in his adolescent office. Prominent men wore the same type of robe, so Samuel fit in as a young man of prominence.

“The young man Samuel continued to grow, and he increased in favor with both the LORD and with men” (1 Samuel 2:26, EHV). Samuel’s training was paying dividends. It was apparent he was a godly, upstanding young man. As he continued to grow older, this fact was always in evidence.

Hannah’s prayers were answered. Perhaps her early prayers were just for a child. God made her wait for years, and then answered her prayers by giving her a son who would be a faithful servant of the Lord, pointing ahead to the Savior who would come to be the greatest servant of the Lord and the sacrifice all people needed for their sins.

#### IV.

Can you be a Hannah? You don’t have to pray that God would give you a child, or promise that you will dedicate your child to serve the Lord as a called worker in the church—growing up to be a pastor or teacher.

Your job is to simply be a mentor.

The Gospel for today reminded us of another Child. “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people” (Luke 2:52, EHV). You know and understand what the child Jesus came to do. He was born into this world as the answer to all our spiritual prayers. He came to be the One who would be the sacrifice for all our failures as children or parents or mentors. You know the completed history of God’s saving activity—that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for the forgiveness of sins for the whole world.

Help others to see what you know and have learned. You, as a parent or grandparent or a mentor, make an impact on the next generation of believers. The priorities you set in life show your own relationship with God to those who are younger in their faith and still growing in their understanding of the Lord. They learn the most by example. The example you set as you worship the Lord and serve the church will continue to have an impact for a long time to come.

Model a Christian life, like Hannah. Her prayers were answered and she dedicated her life to teaching her young son to serve the Lord. She gave thanks to God for answering her prayer and did everything in her power to make sure Samuel understood the grace and love of his Heavenly Father. Her prayers continued for Samuel—that *he* might grow into the kind of God-fearing person Hannah, herself, was. She also provided for him in such a way that Samuel could continue his instruction in the ways of the Most High God.

God has really done it all for us in sending Jesus to be our Savior. All that remains is our thanks to him. We give that thanks by showing the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord.

God bless your work as a Hannah to mentor the next generation. Amen.